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CENTCOM FOR VADM WALSH FROM AMBASSADOR GRAPPO

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TAGS: [PARM](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [KNNP](#) [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [MNUC](#) [MOPS](#) [OVIP](#)
MU
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR NAVCENT COMMANDER VADM PATRICK
WALSH

Classified By: Ambassador Gary A. Grappo for reasons 1.4 (B and D).

Summary

1. (S) Vice Admiral Walsh: Embassy Muscat and I warmly welcome your return to Oman. Oman remains a strong friend and ally in the Global War on Terrorism. Like other GCC countries, it is becoming increasingly concerned with Iranian intentions in the Gulf. Oman expressed high-level interest in the deployment of a second U.S. aircraft carrier to the region, and is following the rumors in the press of a possible third carrier's deployment very closely. Our engagement with the Omani security forces continues to grow and deepen, especially in the area of border and maritime security. You will be visiting just after the Oman-hosted GCC exercise concludes. Our initial assessment is that this exercise, while pointing out areas in need of improvement, was a significant success. It demonstrated the GCC's, and especially Oman's, in-house ability to plan, coordinate and execute a Joint/Combined exercise of over 27,000 personnel and associated equipment for over three weeks. Of interest is that Iran sent observers to portions of this exercise.
End Summary.

Regional Security Concerns

2. (S/NF) While neither the political nor military leadership wants to describe Iran as a threat (they are quick to remind us that "Iran is not an enemy"), Omani officials have indicated that they are very concerned with Iran's nuclear ambitions. In one candid conversation, a senior officer remarked that the Omani military could not decide which the worse option was: a strike against Iran's nuclear capability and the resulting turmoil it would cause in the Gulf, or inaction and having to live with a nuclear-capable Iran (and the probable reaction from Saudi Arabia and Egypt to pursue their own capabilities). The Omani government is growing increasingly concerned over continued violence between Sunni and Shi'a groups in Iraq, which it worries could easily spill into other Gulf countries. Omanis also increasingly fear Iranian meddling and trouble-making in the region, particularly in Iraq and Lebanon, and are worried about the long term consequences if left unchecked. We have added the military pillars of the Gulf Security Dialogue into the upcoming JMC in order to provide a forum to discuss the way-ahead on these issues.

3. (S/NF) The Omani leadership is deeply concerned with

Iraq's future and will want to hear your views on the situation there, as well as the direction the U.S. will take in Iraq in the coming months. Omani government officials have voiced no opposition to a U.S. troop surge as part of the President's new strategy for Iraq, but assert that military force alone will not bring stability to Iraq. Omani officials will also be eager to hear your thoughts on Afghanistan/Pakistan, especially as Oman is seeing an increase in illegal smuggling of people (mostly migrant workers) and drugs coming from that region, often with Iranian involvement.

14. (S) Directly related to the issues above is Oman's strong interest in the rationale for the deployment of the second U.S. aircraft carrier to the Gulf. While we have passed to them the official statement for this deployment, you can expect further inquiries, as well as questions regarding the rumors of a third carrier deployment. Oman is a strong friend and give its concern with possible military actions in the region, appreciates as much information as we can share as early as possible. Keeping the flow of information open has resulted in our gaining complete access to military leaders and facilities, in addition to all needed overflight authorizations.

Domestic Counter-Terrorism Efforts

15. (S) Border control is one of Oman's top priorities. From May-July 06, Omani forces conducted operations to round-up illegal aliens in the country. The combined force, led by the Royal Army of Oman with the assistance of the Air Force, police and the Sultan's Special Forces, was quickly surprised by the scope of the problem. When finished, they had arrested over 7500 persons, the vast majority of whom were economic migrants or workers with expired visas, along

with some smugglers. Most surprising was the admission by the RAO CDR that they had suspected that al-Qa'ida members would be arrested, though the operation reportedly did not result in the detention of any such persons. Since then, the Royal Oman Police Coast Guard (ROPCG) is reporting an increase in the number of smugglers and illegal migrant workers detained. Some are now coming from the former Soviet republics in Central Asia, while more Somalis attempting to enter via Yemen. One unofficial estimate placed the number of illegal immigrants apprehended in 2006 at over 25,000. OMC works with the various military and police services to enhance Oman's ability to both monitor and police its borders. One result of these operations is the realization among the military leadership that they have much to learn in combined/joint operations. OMC is working to assist in this area.

16. (S/NF) The Omani security and intelligence services are professional, well-funded and motivated. Oman is not a regional or offshore financial center and, accordingly, does not have a significant money laundering or terrorist financing problem. While there have been no reported incidents of international or domestic terrorism in Oman, there were arrests of an Ibadi extremist group in 2005, members of which included military, clerical, and private citizens. Oman with its relatively open and welcoming society and increasing numbers of Western tourists remains vulnerable to terrorist attacks. Confident in its security forces and procedures, however, Omani officials continue to argue, "It can't happen here." Recently, Omani security forces have shown an increased interest in counter-IED training and the Sultan's Special Force has asked for a JCET focused on maritime Counter-Terrorism operations (an exercise scheduled for March). It is unknown if they have reason to suspect specific new threats or are simply taking pro-active steps to counter potential security threats.

Maritime Issues

17. (S) We have strong relationships with both the Royal

Navy of Oman (RNO) and the Royal Omani Police/Coast Guard (ROPCG). While working relations with the RNO tend to be more focused on equipment and set-piece exercises, the relationship with ROPCG can be best characterized as overall capability-building. In addition to providing equipment, we have sponsored numerous training efforts using assets from USCG, 5th Fleet and Naval Special Warfare units. The RNO and ROPCG are beginning to realize the need to coordinate some aspects of their operations, and OMC is assisting this effort.

¶18. (S) CDR RAFO may raise with you Omani concerns over aircraft divers. In the past two months over 7 USN aircraft have diverted to Oman. On three occasions the broken aircraft resulted in the closure of RAFO runways (Masirah and Thumrait) for up to 30 hours. The last occasion was during the height of the GCC exercise; CRAFO may ask if there is a way to pre-position assets to tow these broken aircraft. We understand that CENTAF and your staff are looking into this issue. Three diverted aircraft landed at the military side of Seeb International Airport (where the British maintain a small detachment and assist our aircraft). The Seeb military facility is scheduled to close and RAFO has asked CENTAF to build a portion of the new air force base at al-Musanah. CRAFO may use the recent F-18 divers to Seeb to point out that it would be better to have US facilities at al-Musanah once Seeb closes to assist U.S. aircraft needing emergency landings.

Overall Mil-Mil Programs

¶19. (S) Operations: Oman has fully supported all of our access, basing and over-flight requests. NAVCENT flies P-3 patrols from Masirah Island on an irregular single-ship deployment basis. We are enhancing the method in which we share information from these flights with the Omani Navy and Coast Guard. Because of the GCC exercise, NAVCENT's recent requests to use Al Qarin bombing range were denied; however, RAFO states use of the range for USN aircraft will be approved after recovery from the exercise.

¶110. (C) Omani officials will likely ask you for current U.S. thinking on Iran. In addition to briefing Omani officials, your visit to Muscat will afford us an important

opportunity to gauge the views of senior Omanis on Iran and other regional issues. The following are potential questions for your office calls.

- Congratulations on hosting a successful GCC exercise. Are there any particular lessons learned from it?
- Do you foresee any instance in which Iran would pose a security threat to Oman?
- Do you have a strategy or contingency plans to defend against an Iranian threat?
- What kind of threat might Iran, especially if it obtains nuclear weapons capability, pose to other GCC states?
- As a close friend, how can I improve NAVCENT operations to assist Oman?

¶111. (U) In conclusion, the overall Oman-U.S. military-to-military relationship is solid. The day to day interaction is candid and constructive with a strong spirit of cooperation on both sides. We look to strengthen this already sound relationship.

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